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DEPARTMENT FOR PA, NEA/ARN, INR/IC/CD, INR/R/MR:STHIBEAULT AND
JMCCARTER, VOA NEWS CA, NEA/PPD:CBOURGEOIS, AZAIBACK, AND
AFERNANDEZ, IIP/G/NEA-SA MDAVIDSON
WHITE HOUSE FOR NSC
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E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [KMDR](#) [PREL](#) [KPAO](#) [OPRC](#) [SY](#)

SUBJECT: Asad, Syria/US, Syria/OIC, Iraq, Iran, Lebanon, Palestinian
Territories (12/25-26)

¶1. Summary: Syrian papers on Dec. 26 reported that President Asad on Dec. 25 participated in Christmas celebrations and exchanged congratulations with Christian clergymen and others at the Patriarchate of The Syriac Orthodox Church in old Damascus. Patriarch Ignatius IV Hazim of Antioch and All the East for Roman Catholics, and Patriarch Zakka I Iwas of the Syriac Orthodox Church expressed gratitude for President Asad's participation in the celebrations and reiterated the importance of Christmas for the whole world, particularly in this region. President Asad congratulated Christians on Christmas Day, stressing that "Arabism is not a race; it is a strong civilization belonging to Christianity, Islam, Judaism and to all races in the region," Asad said.

On Syrian/US relations, papers reported Foreign Minister Mouallem's meeting on Dec. 25 with US Senator Arlen Specter. Both sides reviewed current regional developments. During the meeting, Mouallem stressed the need to exert every possible effort to realize security and stability in the region by ending the Israeli occupation and liberating occupied Arab lands, including the Golan. Papers also featured statements by US Senator Christopher Dodd, and Senator John Kerry urging the US administration to hold dialogue with Syria to achieve stability in the region.

Papers also reported President Asad's meeting with the Secretary General of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu. Talks touched on the latest developments in the Palestinian arena in particular and in the region in general and the efforts exerted to reform the OIC. During the meeting, Ihsanoglu talked about the outcome of his tour in the region, particularly in the occupied Palestinian territories, and issues of OIC interest. President Asad stressed the necessity of supporting efforts exerted by the OIC and enhancing its role on all levels in the interest of Islamic countries.

End of summary.

¶2. Selected Headlines:

"President Asad participates in Christmas celebrations. President Asad: We are politically, religiously and culturally united.... We must convey a message of coexistence to the world.... The true

civilized message of Islam and Christianity emerged from Syria" (Government-owned Tishreen, 12/26)

"Foreign Minister Mouallem reviews regional developments with US Senator Specter: The region needs peace, stability and an end of Israeli occupation.... The US is responsible for this" (Government-owned Tishree, 12/26)

"Senator Kerry urges the US Administration to open dialogue with Syria" (Government-owned Tishreen, 12/25)

"President Asad discusses developments in the Palestinian arena with OIC Secretary General Oglu, reiterating Syria's support of OIC efforts. Oglu: I carry an initiative to ease tension in the Palestinian territories" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 12/25)

"The Lebanese opposition prepares a parliamentary petition on the governing team's violations of the constitution. A huge popular rally to confirm continuing sit-in" (Government-owned Tishreen, 12/26)

"A season of initiatives after the Eid. Former Lebanese Premier Hoss urges Lahoud to announce expiration of the al-Saniora government. Italian PM Prodi: We support Lebanon's unity and independence" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 12/25)

"Three US soldiers killed in Baghdad and al-Anbar. British forces destroy an Iraqi police station in Basra" (Government-owned Tishreen, 12/26)

"US forces arrest two Iranian diplomats in Baghdad. Iraq protests the act. Tehran warns against consequences" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 12/26)

"Baghdad security plan is postponed until the beginning of next year. Ten US troops killed or wounded in attacks in Baghdad and al-Anbar" (Government-owned Tishreen, 12/25)

The Iranian Shura Council urges the government to freeze activities of international inspectors in the wake of UNSC Resolution 1737. Ahmadinejad: The West has to accept Iran as a nuclear state" (Government-owned Al-Ba'th, 12/25)

13. Editorial Block Quotes:

"The Motives of Resolution 1737"

Muhammad Khayr al-Jammali, a commentator in government-owned Al-Thawra, commented (12/26): "Iran has the right to view Security Council Resolution 1737, which imposes sanctions on Iran because of its nuclear activities, as an unjust and illegal resolution flouting the UN Charter.... Iran's nuclear program is of a peaceful nature as proven by surveys and inspections conducted by the IAEA....

"The resolution was issued against the background of a campaign of deception and trickery over the Iranian nuclear project. This campaign was organized by neoconservatives in the US administration with clear Israeli incitement....

"The Security Council exceeded its powers and contravened the principles of the UN Charter.... The Security Council ignored Israeli nuclear weapons as a genuine threat to world peace and security.... It turned its attention to an unreal threat that exists only in the heads of the neoconservatives and the Israeli leaders, who are promoting this imaginary danger to tighten their control on the Middle East....

"If the resolution is viewed from the perspective of the troubled American policy in the region and the world, and even inside the United States itself, one can see that its aim was to ease the crisis of the US Administration. For President Bush and leaders of the Zionist right working with him can now claim that the resolution is an accomplishment for American policy in the United Nations and the Middle East...."

"Syria Indeed Knows What It Must Do"

Izz-al-Din al-Darwish, an editorialist in government-owned Tishreen, commented (12/25): "President Bush, his Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, British Prime Minister Tony Blair, and those who move in their orbit in the West, have often reiterated the sentence: 'We are waiting to see what Syria is going to do, and it knows what it must do.' Here, they refer to Syria's positions toward the events in the region, particularly in Iraq, the Palestinian territories, and Lebanon. It must be noted that the sentence is purely American-made.

"It is no secret to any observer that this American-Western view, which converges with the hostile Israeli policies, constitutes a trial balloon to entice Syria and drive it to change its convictions about national and pan-Arab issues so that it can be accepted by Israel and the West and so that a dialogue can be launched with it on their own terms to realize the objectives that they set in advance as instructions that must be implemented.

"Syria has repeatedly said that it does not act in this way and that it cannot change its national principles simply because others want it to.... Syria has issues that are not open for bargaining. These issues constitute the basis of all positions it takes and the policies it adopts toward the region and its developments....

"They built their policies toward Syria on Israeli foundations and a spiteful concept. But Syria has adhered to its positions and resisted pressure, accusations, and sieges without abandoning any of its principles. And it will not abandon these principles no matter what they do. Syria is ready for dialogue and discussion but on bases that serve its national and pan-Arab principles...."

"It Requires No Cleverness"

Ali Nasrallah, a commentator in government-owned Al-Thawra, said (12/25): "The governing coalition in Lebanon is not only rejecting and aborting the Arab League SecGen's effort to resolve the Lebanese political crisis, but is also tirelessly searching for a detonator and unashamedly trying to invent more nonsensical arguments to obstruct all state establishments....

"The overwhelming majority of the Lebanese are convinced that there is involvement in a foreign plan and agenda that the February 14 forces pledged to implement to the end, irrespective of the disastrous results for them, their people, and their country."

"The February 14 team is not really interested in the international tribunal or the truth. It is obstructing the tribunal and the truth. Otherwise, why does it fear every question regarding the false witnesses and the tribunal's law? Why does it want to pass the tribunal in a manner that appears more like theft? Why does it violate the constitution and the coexistence convention and refuse to comply with the will of the people and to return to the people if it really enjoys the people's confidence and claims it represents the majority in parliament?

"The February 14 team knows that the tribunal is the last link in the chain of the conspiracy of turning Lebanon into a follower of the foreign world.... It sticks to the tribunal and its law not to reveal the truth but to complete the American-Israeli plan...."

"The Courage of Confessing Mistakes"

Ahmad Dawwa, a commentator in government-owned Al-Thawra, said

(12/25): "Recent American statements suggest that the US Administration is likely to ignore the Baker-Hamilton recommendations and take a different course that would increase lack of security and political tension in Iraq and pave the way for very serious possibilities....

"The recent accusations against the Al-Sadr movement can only be seen in this context. It appears that Bush's conservative machine is still determined to push Iraq toward civil war and sectarian and denominational fighting to fulfill its objectives....

"Advocates of creative chaos are looking for a pretext to escalate political and security tension among Iraqi political groups. The accusations that were leveled against the Al-Sadr movement, especially those linked to assassinations and bombings, show the malicious goals, namely, presenting this Iraqi team as a party in conflict with the government on the one hand and with the other political parties on the other. The success of this attempt would torpedo the Baker-Hamilton report.... President Bush lacks the courage to reverse the mistakes and correct US policy in Iraq and the world at large.... Bush does not have enough time for much maneuvering.... The cohesion of Iraqis in the face of attempts to push them toward a clash, will force him to accept the advice of his fellow Americans...."

Corbin